

I am here today as an individual employee of a Michigan Conservation District and also as the Vice President of the Michigan Conservation District Critical Dune Partnership, which represents Conservation Districts from all 19 counties that have critical dune areas within their boundaries. We are in opposition of Senate Bill 1130, specifically as it relates to eliminating Conservation Districts from the critical dune process. We are also opposed to other aspects of the bill, including the manner in which it was developed without the involvement of Conservation Districts, who are a major partner in the delivery of the program, but today I would like to focus on only the exclusion of Conservation Districts from the critical dune process itself. Conservation Districts play a vital role in the delivery of the critical dune program by providing assurances that vegetation will be removed and replaced in a way that allows for multiple uses while minimizing the impacts on the critical dune resource. Conservation Districts provide assistance at the local level to landowners, elected officials, builders, contractors, architects, landscapers, and others that live and work in critical dune areas. Local assistance is essential to the success of any land management or protection program. Conservation District staff live and work in the local community and are readily available to answer questions and provide one-on-one assistance. Conservation Districts are in a unique position not only to be able to provide technical assistance, but also education to local landowners, elected officials and others on critical dune ecology, protection and restoration. Conservation District staff also provide valuable local ecological knowledge and on-the-ground technical assistance to DEQ staff that are not local to the critical dune areas. Through the Critical Dune Partnership, Conservation Districts have developed a consistent and streamlined process to deliver our responsibilities as outlined in the critical dune law. We have worked diligently to develop standardized forms and procedures that are used by all Conservation Districts that are providing vegetation removal assurances. The Partnership has also provided a platform for cooperation, support and training for Conservation Districts to participate in the critical dune program. It is in large part due to the efforts of the Partnership and the support of our local landowners, elected officials, builders, contractors, architects, landscapers, and local DEQ staff that the Conservation Districts' role in the critical dune permit process works extremely well. While there may be faults with other parts of the critical dune permitting process, the Conservation District's responsibilities have been streamlined and are delivered in an efficient and timely manner, much to the satisfaction of applicants and landowners. Michigan Conservation Districts have a long history of successfully delivering local conservation programs to local landowners and we look forward to continuing to provide this level of service well into the future. As such, we are opposed to Senate Bill 1130.

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